IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

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TYREKE SMITH	:	
303 W Somerville Avenue		

Philadelphia, PA 19120

Plaintiff,

v.

THE TRUSTEES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA d/b/a HOSPITAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA 3600 Chestnut Street, Suite 228 Philadelphia, PA 19104

Defendant.

CIVIL ACTION

No.

JURY TRIAL DEMANDED

CIVIL ACTION COMPLAINT

Plaintiff, Tyreke Smith, (hereinafter referred to as "Plaintiff"), by and through his undersigned counsel, hereby avers as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. This action has been initiated by Plaintiff against the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania d/b/a Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania ("HUP") (hereinafter referred to as "Defendant") for violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended ("ADA" - 42 USC §§ 12101, et. seq.), the Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA" - 29 U.S.C. §§ 2601, et. seq.), the Philadelphia Fair Practices Ordinance ("PFPO"), and the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act ("PHRA").¹

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¹ Plaintiff intends to amend his instant lawsuit to include claims under the PHRA and PFPO on or about August 9, 2025, once his administrative remedies are fully exhausted with the appropriate administrative agency. Plaintiff dual-filed his Charge of Discrimination on August 9, 2024. Any claims under the PHRA and PFPO would mirror the instant ADA claims identically.

2. Plaintiff asserts, *inter alia*, that he experienced unlawful workplace discrimination and retaliation, culminating in his unlawful termination from Defendant. As a direct consequence of Defendant's unlawful actions, Plaintiff seeks damages as set forth herein.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 3. This Court may properly maintain personal jurisdiction over Defendant because Defendant's contacts with this State and this judicial district are sufficient for the exercise of jurisdiction over Defendant to comply with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice, satisfying the standard set forth by the United States Supreme Court in <u>International Shoe Co. v.</u> Washington, 326 U.S. 310 (1945) and its progeny.
- 4. The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania has original subject matter jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 because the claims arise under laws of the United States. This Court has supplemental jurisdiction over Plaintiff's state and local law claim(s) because such claim(s) arise out of the same common nucleus of operative facts as his federal claims asserted herein.
- 5. Venue is properly laid in this District pursuant to 28 U.S.C. sections 1391(b)(1) and (b)(2), because Defendant resides in and/or conducts business in this judicial district and because a substantial part of the acts and/or omissions giving rise to the claims set forth herein occurred in this judicial district.
- 6. On or about August 9, 2024, Plaintiff filed a Charge of Discrimination and retaliation with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC"). Plaintiff has properly exhausted his administrative remedies before initiating this action by timely filing and dual-filing his Charge with the EEOC, and by filing the instant lawsuit within 90 days of receiving a right-to-sue letter from the EEOC.

PARTIES

- 7. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
 - 8. Plaintiff is an adult individual with an address as set forth above.
- 9. Defendant owns and operates various health care facilities, including HUP, and is the largest employer in Philadelphia.
- 10. At all times relevant herein, Defendant acted by and through its agents, servants, and employees, each of whom acted at all times relevant herein in the course and scope of their employment with and for the benefit of Defendant.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

- 11. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 12. On or about September 12, 2022, Defendant hired Plaintiff and employed him in its environmental services department for approximately twenty (20) months until unlawfully terminating him on or about May 23, 2024, as discussed in detail herein.
- 13. Throughout his employment, Plaintiff was primarily supervised by Defendant's Manager, Ronald Willford ("Willford").
- 14. Plaintiff's mother suffers from numerous disabilities and serious medical conditions.
- 15. As a result, Plaintiff serves as her primary caretaker and assists her with daily life activities, including but not limited to, assistance with health treatments and appointments (among other caretaking responsibilities).

- 16. Because Plaintiff was his mother's primary caretaker, he incurred occasional absences when his mother needed treatment or other appointments/assistance for associated conditions/complications.
- 17. Initially, Willford disciplined Plaintiff for these absences, issuing him discipline on April 14, 2023, August 16, 2023, and again on October 4, 2023.
- 18. Plaintiff had explained to Willford that his absences were due to his primary caregiver status, but at no time did Willford offer, explain, or otherwise mention FMLA (or any other leave of absence) as an option for Plaintiff following his one-year work anniversary with Defendant.
- 19. After learning about FMLA through a co-worker, on or about November 22, 2023, Plaintiff applied for intermittent FMLA through Defendant's Third-Party Administrator ("TPA") and was ultimately approved to take 2-3 days per week to help care for his mother from November 27, 2023 through May 26, 2024.
- 20. Plaintiff apprised Willford of his application for, and approval of, intermittent FMLA, and Willford immediately and aggressively confronted Plaintiff demanding to know why he "needed" FMLA.
- 21. Plaintiff responded and told Willford, again, that he was his mother's caregiver, but instead of being understanding, Willford reacted by treating Plaintiff in a retaliatory and discriminatory manner, subjecting him to a hostile working environment.
 - 22. By way of example only, Willford would make remarks to Plaintiff such as:
 - a. "You're always out (on FMLA);"
 - b. "You are abusing your FMLA;" and
 - c. "You are not at work enough."

- 23. Willford would make these statements both directly to Plaintiff, as well as to Plaintiff's colleagues, despite his explicit notice that Plaintiff's absences were approved by Defendant's TPA as FMLA-qualifying.
- 24. Additionally, Willford often threatened Plaintiff with unwarranted discipline, including threatening to write him up for being out of work or leaving early (when utilizing FMLA leave to care for his mother).
- 25. Willford began to also routinely nit-pick, badger, and belittle Plaintiff about his work.
- 26. Plaintiff did not observe Willford treat other employees who were not utilizing FMLA leave in a similar manner (as discussed above).
- 27. In the weeks leading up to Plaintiff's termination, Willford became increasingly agitated and annoyed any time Plaintiff used FMLA leave to care for his mother.
- 28. Plaintiff complained about Willford's discriminatory treatment to other managers Ricard Garner ("Garner") and James (Last Name Unknown), but he was told to simply stay out of Willford's way.
- 29. Thereafter, on or about May 23, 2024, Willford suddenly terminated Plaintiff for pretextual and false reasons, claiming that he had caught Plaintiff sleeping on the job.
- 30. To be clear, Plaintiff was not sleeping on the job, and Defendant could not elaborate or provide any evidence to substantiate Willford's unfounded allegation.
- 31. Willford stated that Garner had witnessed Plaintiff sleeping, but when Plaintiff questioned this, Garner confirmed to Plaintiff that he had not seen him sleeping as he [Garner] was behind Willford when he came into the room.

- 32. Further, unlike other similarly situated employees, Plaintiff was terminated for an alleged first offense (which again did not happen), having never been disciplined or warned before about sleeping on the job. Willford would frequently just verbally admonish employees who were actually sleeping on the job; however, these employees were not utilizing FMLA for a parent, like Plaintiff.
- 33. At no time did Willford or anyone else at Defendant tell Plaintiff that he was not eligible for re-hire.

-FACTS SUPPORTING POST EMPLOYMENT RETALIATION-

- 34. After his termination from Defendant, on or about August 9, 2024, Plaintiff filed a Charge of Discrimination with the EEOC.
- 35. Within his EEOC charge Plaintiff outlined that he believe he was targeted, subjected to a hostile work environment, and ultimately terminated because he was negatively associated with his mother's disabilities and/or because of his request/utilization of FMLA leave.
- 36. Plaintiff subsequently became employed by Crothall Healthcare ("Crothall") (a temporary agency focused on placement and staffing within healthcare facilities such as Defendant).
- 37. Plaintiff was assured of the prospect of potential permanent employment through direct hire if he performed well.
- 38. Crothall placed Plaintiff to work at HUP during which time Plaintiff was jointly-employed by Crothall and Defendant with the potential of direct hire in the future.
- 39. However, shortly after beginning orientation on or about October 21, 2024, Crothall's Regional Training Manager, Arisa Humphrey ("Humphrey"), informed Plaintiff that Defendant's Human Resources stated: (a) Plaintiff was "not allowed in the building;" (2) "Penn

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does not want [Plaintiff] here;" and (3) his employment was being terminated because he could not work for Defendant any longer.

40. Plaintiff believes and therefore avers that Defendant ended his assignment in October of 2024 in violation of the ADA and FMLA.

COUNT I <u>Violations of Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA")</u> (Wrongful Termination - Interference & Retaliation)

- 41. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 42. Plaintiff was a full-time employee who worked for Defendant for more than 1 year within a location that employed at least 50 employees within 75 miles.
- 43. Plaintiff exercised his FMLA rights and had additional FMLA leave eligibility remaining at the time of his termination.
- 44. After being approved for intermittent FMLA, Defendant's management continuously questioned Plaintiff's use and continued attempted use of his FMLA entitlement.
- 45. Defendant terminated Plaintiff in extremely suggestive and close proximity to his most recent usage of FMLA leave.
- 46. The motivating and/or determinative factor in deciding to terminate Plaintiff's employment was (a) his use of FMLA; (b) to prevent him from utilizing future FMLA leave; and/or (c) to dissuade him or others from utilizing FMLA.
- 47. Defendant committed interference and retaliation violations of the FMLA by *inter alia*: (1) terminating Plaintiff in May of 2024 and October of 2024 for requesting and/or exercising his FMLA rights; (2) terminating Plaintiff in May of 2024 and October of 2024 and/or subjecting him to a hostile work environment to dissuade Plaintiff from utilizing FMLA leave;

(3) considering Plaintiff's FMLA leave needs in making the decision to terminate him in May of 2024 and October of 2024; (4) terminating to prevent him from taking FMLA-qualifying leave in the future; (5) terminating Plaintiff in May of 2024 because he complained about the harassment he was being subjected to in violation of the FMLA; (6) terminating Plaintiff in October of 2024 because he complained about the harassment he was being subjected to in violation of the FMLA and/or filed an EEOC charge outlining Defendant's FMLA violation; and/or (7) taking actions towards him that would dissuade a reasonable person from exercising his rights under the FMLA.

COUNT II

<u>Violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act, as Amended ("ADA")</u> ([1] Associational Disability Discrimination; and [2] Hostile Work Environment; and [3] Retaliation)

- 48. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 49. Plaintiff avers that Defendant terminated his employment in May of 2024 because it (a) perceived Plaintiff as being distracted when dealing with his mother's health conditions outside of work; (b) perceived Plaintiff as having to miss too much time from work to care for his mother; (c) had other negative perceptions of Plaintiff in association with his mother's health conditions; (d) he complained about Defendant's constant harassment and negative perceptions of Plaintiff related to his mother's health conditions and need to care for his mother and was terminated shortly following his most recent complaints.
- 50. Plaintiff initiated EEOC proceedings (a protected activity) on or about August 9, 2024.

- 51. Shortly thereafter, Defendant informed Crothall that Plaintiff was (a) "not allowed in the building;" (2) "Penn does not want [Plaintiff] here;" and (3) required his employment to be terminated because he could not work for Defendant any longer.
- 52. Plaintiff avers that Defendant terminated his employment in October of 2024 because it (a) perceived that Plaintiff would be distracted when dealing with his mother's health conditions outside of work; (b) perceived Plaintiff as having to miss too much time from work to care for his mother; (c) had other negative perceptions of Plaintiff in association with his mother's health conditions; and/or (d) because he complained about Defendant's constant harassment and negative perceptions of Plaintiff related to his mother's health conditions and need to care for his mother and was terminated shortly following his most recent complaints and/or filed an EEOC charge.
- 53. These actions as aforesaid constitute violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays that this Court enter an Order providing that:

- A. Defendant is to compensate Plaintiff, reimburse Plaintiff, and make Plaintiff whole for any and all pay and benefits Plaintiff would have received had it not been for Defendant's illegal actions, including but not limited to back pay, front pay, salary, pay increases, bonuses, insurance, benefits, training, promotions, reinstatement, and seniority.
- B. Plaintiff is to be awarded liquidated and/or punitive damages, as permitted by applicable law, in an amount believed by the Court or trier of fact to be appropriate to punish Defendant for its willful, deliberate, malicious and outrageous conduct and to deter Defendant or other employers from engaging in such misconduct in the future;

- C. Plaintiff is to be accorded other equitable and legal relief as the Court deems just, proper, and appropriate (including but not limited to damages for emotional distress / pain and suffering);
- D. Plaintiff is to be awarded the costs and expenses of this action and reasonable attorney's fees as provided by applicable federal and state law; and
 - E. Plaintiff is to be given a trial by jury.

Respectfully submitted,

KARPF, KARPF & CERUTTI, P.C.

By:

Ari R. Karpf, Esq. 8 Interplex Drive, Suite 210 Feasterville-Trevose, PA 19053

(215) 639-0801

Dated: May 21, 2025

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

CASE MANAGEMENT TRACK DESIGNATION FORM

Tyreke Smith	:	CIVIL ACTION				
V.	:					
The Trustees of the University of Pennsylv	vania d/b/a Hospital of the University of Penns	ylvania NO.				
plaintiff shall complete a Ca filing the complaint and serv side of this form.) In the e designation, that defendant s the plaintiff and all other par	se Management Track Designate a copy on all defendants. (See event that a defendant does no shall, with its first appearance,	Reduction Plan of this court, couns ation Form in all civil cases at the ties \$1:03 of the plan set forth on the rest agree with the plaintiff regarding submit to the clerk of court and ser ik Designation Form specifying the ed.	me of everse g said ve on			
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(a) Habeas Corpus – Cases	brought under 28 U.S.C. § 224	1 through § 2255.	()			
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(c) Arbitration – Cases requ	ired to be designated for arbitra	ation under Local Civil Rule 53.2.	()			
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management cases.) (f) Standard Management – Cases that do not fall into any one of the other tracks.						
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5/21/2025		Plaintiff				
Date	Attorney-at-law	Attorney for				
215-639-0801	215-639-4970	akarpf@karpf-law.com				
Telephone	FAX Number	E-Mail Address				

FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

DESIGNATION FORM

Place of Accident, Incident, or Transaction: Defendants place of business

RELAT	ED CASE IF ANY: Case Number:	Judge:				
1.	1. Does this case involve property included in an earlier numbered suit?					
2.	Does this case involve a transaction or occurrence which was the	he subject of an earlier numbered suit?	Yes			
3.	3. Does this case involve the validity or infringement of a patent which was the subject of an earlier numbered suit?					
4.	4. Is this case a second or successive habeas corpus petition, social security appeal, or pro se case filed by the same individual?					
5.	5. Is this case related to an earlier numbered suit even though none of the above categories apply? Ye If yes, attach an explanation.					
	I certify that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the within case \square is $/ \times$ is not related to any pending or previously terminated action in this court.					
Civil Lit	igation Categories					
A.	Federal Question Cases:	B. Diversity Jurisdiction Cases:				
I certify beyond federal	1. Indemnity Contract, Marine Contract, and All Other Contracts) 2. FELA 3. Jones Act-Personal Injury 4. Antitrust 5. Wage and Hour Class Action/Collective Action 6. Patent 7. Copyright/Trademark 8. Employment 9. Labor-Management Relations 10. Civil Rights 11. Habeas Corpus 12. Securities Cases 13. Social Security Review Cases 14. Qui Tam Cases 15. Cases Seeking Systemic Relief *see certification below* 16. All Other Federal Question Cases. (Please specify): that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, that the remedy so the parties before the court and does / X does not seek to law including a rule, regulation, policy, or order of the executive and/or any form of injunctive relief.	1. Insurance Contract and Other Contracts 2. Airplane Personal Injury 3. Assault, Defamation 4. Marine Personal Injury 5. Motor Vehicle Personal Injury 6. Other Personal Injury (Please specify): 7. Products Liability 8. All Other Diversity Cases: (Please specify) ought in this case does / does not have implicated a does or mandate statewide or nationwide enforcement of	ations f a state or			
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JS 44 (Rev. 04/21)

Case 2:25-cv-02600-Peiviloung of 18 Spiled 95/21/25 Page 13 of 13

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

1. (a) PLAINTIFFS SMITH, TYREKE				DEFENDANTS						
			THE TRUSTEES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA D/B/A HOSPITAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA							
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)				Philadelphia						
			County of Residence of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY)							
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(c) Attorneys (Firm Name,	Address and Talanhana Numbe	ow)		Attorneys (If Knor		· LAND IN	VOLVED.			
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